



# Towards Understanding and Healing

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

WINTER 2004

## Quarterly Newsletter

Visit our website: [www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm](http://www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm)

## TUH Launches its New Quarterly Newsletter

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Sara Cook,  
Coordinator

Sarah Lockhart,  
Projects & Outreach

Denise McDaid,  
Administrator

### Management Committee:

Maureen Hetherington,  
Co-chairperson

Jim O'Neill,  
Co-chairperson

Eamonn Deane

Michael Doherty

Owen Donnelly

Seamas Heaney

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Hugh Rowan

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Welcome to the debut issue of Towards Understanding and Healing's quarterly newsletter.

It has been a busy several months here at Towards Understanding and Healing. After hosting "Our Stories: A Women's Storytelling Residential" in July, things haven't stopped moving here in the office!

In September, we hosted a dialogue-based conference (see inside article). Then, it was only a few weeks before our "introduction to storytelling" residential for

community workers in October, followed by another women's residential in November. Interwoven through all this has been single identity work.

Through all these events, the diverse group of people with whom we work has grown tremendously, with about two hundred people now part of the Towards Understanding and Healing community.

This newsletter is a way for us to keep in touch with you and to share with you the work we have been doing here.

We hope, too, that you will keep in touch with us. Share with us any ideas you may have for projects or events. Pass our information on to colleagues, friends, or family that may want to become involved. Visit us at our offices in The Junction, or ring us just to say "hello." With your input we can continue to be effective in the New Year.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

- Sara, Sarah, Denise,  
and the Management Committee

## Upcoming Events

### Christmas Party

In response to the overwhelming number of requests from participants to have a reunion with fellow conference and residential participants, TUH is hosting a social evening to do just that!

Come celebrate the Christmas season:

#### Where:

The Junction, 8 Bishop Street,  
Derry/Londonderry

#### When:

7:00 pm, 9 Dec. 2004

#### Please RSVP:

028 7137 0685

### February 18-20 Storytelling Residential

Interested in participating in a storytelling residential? Know of anyone else who may like to participate? Contact Sara or Sarah for more information

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TUH  
The Junction  
8 Bishop St.  
Derry/Londonderry  
BT48 6PW

TEL: 44 28 7137 0685  
FAX: 44 28 7126 4641

## Storytelling for Peace

- Caren Neile, International Storytelling Center

Attorney Stewart Levine tells the story of the lawyer who won his client a \$500,000 judgment in a two-hour hearing. When the delighted attorney turned to his client after the hearing, however, he found him crestfallen.

"What's the matter?" the lawyer asked. "You just won \$500,000!"

The client shook his head. "But I never got to tell my story."

"When people have conflict with each other," Levine explains, "they have the story about the conflict, and the story is the way they talk to themselves. ... One of the most important ways to resolve conflict is to let people tell their story."

Numerous storytellers, scholars and other professionals support the view that stories bear the seeds of peace and reconciliation, both because a feel for story is part of what it means to be human and because of the inherent narrative nature of conflict. These professionals have long noted the human instinct for story, referring to humans as *homo narrans*, a "storytelling animal." The fact that we experience life as narrative allows us to understand the actions of others through the sharing of stories and, in turn, to form healthy, respectful, and productive relationships.

"Like incidents in real life, the story kindles emotions and encourages theorizing," says Ruth Stotter, author of *More About Story* (Stotter Press). Story, continues Stotter, enables people "to distance themselves from the immediate problem at hand allowing a more objective, dispassionate examination of issues."

When faced with conflict, we can use both the emotions and the perspective engendered by story to good advantage. According to Annette Simmons in *The Story Factor* (Perseus), story creates an alternative viewpoint. Conflict comes from a small picture that looks like you and I are separate. Story has the capacity to hold both of us in the same story and show what we have in common, as well as to ignite or awaken the feelings of sisterhood and brotherhood that transcend our differences. It doesn't solve our differences; it creates something that's bigger than our differences.

Storytelling allows us to experience the universal truths found in shared circumstances. Carl Jung's pivotal work on the collective unconscious underscores this notion of universal truths. The archetypes shared among disparate peoples suggest that we are all parts of a whole, and that to cut ourselves off from that whole is to sever the connection with the source of our existence.

Story also allows for a new vision of the possible. In *Getting to Resolution: Turning Conflict into Collaboration* (Berrett-Koehler), Levine considers story-sharing a vital step in conflict resolution. He describes the process of conflict resolution as one of all sides' bringing their stories to the table and emerging with a new, shared story for the future. That is to say, although holding separate stories is potentially divisive, sharing these stories and creating others builds bridges among the stories, as well as among those who carry them. In addition, stories in the Western tradition are predicated on conflict—and its resolution. By presenting a model of conflict transformed, a story helps people envision peaceful solutions to their own problems.

UNESCO designated 2001 the International Year for Dialogue Among Civilisations, a fitting start to the Decade of Peace and Nonviolence. Throughout the world, people are using storytelling to bridge chasms of distrust and prejudice. In Australia, a program called Pulkids is helping children connect with each other and the Earth through stories. In Northern Ireland, storyteller Liz Weir has used storytelling to connect war-torn communities. And in the U.S., lawyer Stewart Levine uses stories to bring together opposing people and organizations. (continued on page 4)

***You can hate someone whose story you know. But with every honest, heartfelt, true reflection of a human life, you can hold onto your hatred a little less.***  
—Judith Black

## Nearly 100 participants gather for "When The Fighting Stops...A Dialogue on Community Healing"

Towards Understanding and Healing, in conjunction with the Community Healing Programme of the Old Library Trust, hosted an international conference from 27-29 September 2004 in Lismavady.

The three-day conference brought together a wide diversity of people from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain for in-depth dialogue. The conference started with a brief welcome from Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive of the Community Relations Council, before participants headed off to meet their small dialogue groups. Each group included about ten people, including two experienced facilitators.

The conference was punctuated by presentations from five international speakers that brought with them different perspectives influenced by their experiences of conflict in their own parts of the world.

Dr. Abdul Aziz Said, director of the Centre for Global Peace and chair of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Programme at American Uni-

versity in Washington, DC spoke first, along with his colleague, Dr. Mubarak Awad. Both spoke about broad ideas of peace and understanding, and about their experiences working in other conflict areas.

Dr. Awad, having arrived in Northern Ireland directly from Israel/Palestine, discussed his interactions there and the thoughts that Palestinians had shared with him about Northern Ireland.

Leonel Narvaez kicked off the second day by describing his work addressing family, social, and political violence in Colombia by helping both perpetrators and victims of violence come to terms with their past and construct a different future.

Ada Pecos Melton, an American Indian of the Pueblo of Jemez in New Mexico, spoke about the work she has done to strengthen indigenous methods of conflict resolution in the tribal courts system in the U.S. Her work on alternative, community, and restorative justice sparked discussions on methods that could be employed in Northern

Ireland.

The conference's last speaker, Father Michael Lapsley, spoke on Wednesday morning about his own journey of healing after suffering serious injuries and losing both his hands in a letter bomb attack by the South African government.

An Anglican priest, Father Lapsley was active in the ANC during the anti-apartheid movement. After the attack, he founded a storytelling project called the Institute for the Healing of Memories, a programme now in use in Northern Ireland.

Despite powerful contributions from the speakers through their presentations, the heart of the conference remained the dialogue groups. The speakers frequently joined the participants in their small groups, fueling discussion and allowing for more interaction.

The direction of the dialogue varied between groups. They discussed the meaning of words such as "reconciliation," "forgiveness," and "justice."  
(continued on page 4)

## Series of Women's Storytelling Residentials a Success

Towards Understanding and Healing held its first women's storytelling weekend residential in Rathmullan, County Donegal in July. Although a large group of 25 participants from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain attended, there were still doz-

ens of women that weren't able to come. We were amazed at such interest!

In order to accommodate the over-subscription, we held a second women's residential on Lusty Beg Island for 15 participants from across Northern Ireland and Done-

gal. Once again, many participants arrived nervous, shy, or uncertain about what to expect but left having made connections across community and geographic boundaries. One participant wrote, "(I had) a lovely and most enriching weekend which will stay with me in my thoughts always."

## Storytelling for Peace... (continued from page 2)

Are storytellers the most appropriate professionals to wage peace? John Paul Lederach believes that all sectors of society must participate in the task of peacebuilding, which needs to include a "comprehensive, multifaceted strategy" not only for ending violence, but also for achieving and sustaining reconciliation. He notes that people "need opportunity and space to express to and with one another the trauma of loss and their grief...anger, pain, memory of injustice." Storytelling affords such an opportunity.

\* Excerpted with permission from the International Storytelling Center: <http://www.storytellingcenter.com>

## "When The Fighting Stops..." (continued from page 3)

Groups also discussed policing; class issues; youth issues; and issues of political empowerment, interface violence, and remembering the past literally and symbolically, among many other topics.

The feedback from the conference has been extremely positive. As one participant wrote, "When individuals get a chance to meet the 'other' and see the real human being, a miracle happens. Healing comes to both." For many, the conference was a step Towards Understanding and Healing.

**\* For more information about the conference and to download the speakers' presentations, visit us on the web:**

**[www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm](http://www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm)**

## Storytelling in the Community

The idea of "storytelling" can be quite tricky. What does TUH mean when we say "storytelling?" Why did we start using it as a way to address the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland? How can it be used in different communities?

These are the types of questions we explored during our three-day residential for over twenty community workers, held 25-27 October on Lusty Beg Island. Maureen Hetherington, co-chairperson and founder of Towards Understanding and Healing, presented a wealth of information to participants, along with Marie Therese O'Hagan, who once served as coordinator for Towards Understanding and Healing and has extensive experience in the storytel-

ling process.

Maureen and Marie Therese discussed the development of storytelling projects in Northern Ireland, the elements of storytelling processes and how the processes can be used, and ethical issues to consider in storytelling.

Participants had small group discussions throughout the three days and actually experienced a small group storytelling process for themselves.

Participants left the residential with a better understanding of what storytelling and TUH may be able to offer their communities. In addition, some participants later chose to participate in a full storytelling residential themselves!

**Towards Understanding and Healing is an organisation that recognizes the individual experience in the context of the larger story of conflict in Northern Ireland. TUH offers a safe space for people to begin to articulate personal stories, and also to listen to other stories or truths in a way that does not diminish their own experience.**

Newsletter written & edited by:

Sarah Lockhart  
slockhart@thejunction-ni.org

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